



Center for Gun Policy and Research

EVIDENCE-BASED LAW ENFORCEMENT AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

This Research Brief summarizes research on law enforcement and community-led initiatives which have research evidence to support their effectiveness in preventing illegal gun trafficking and gun violence.

Law Enforcement Initiatives to Reduce Gun Violence

A. Policing Gun Sellers

Enforcement Actions Focused on Gun Dealers

Undercover stings of suspect gun dealers, coupled with prosecutions and publicity about the effort, can lead to substantial reductions in the number of new guns diverted to criminals. Using this strategy, Chicago and Detroit saw reductions in the diversion of recently purchased guns from in-state dealers to criminals of 62% and 36%, respectively.¹ States that have and enforce (through regular compliance inspections) comprehensive regulations on gun dealers have fewer guns sold by in-state gun stores that are diverted to criminals soon after retail sale.²

Strategic Anti-Gun-Trafficking Enforcement

Boston police collaborated with ATF on an anti-gun-trafficking initiative which involved analyzing crime gun trace data, debriefing suspects about illegal gun suppliers, and follow-up investigations of individuals suspected of trafficking guns to gangs. An evaluation of this effort found that this strategy led to a significant reduction in the diversion of guns to criminals.³

B. Deterring Illegal Gun Possession and Use

Gun Carrying Suppression Units

Many shootings result from spontaneous conflicts involving an individual who is illegally carrying a gun. Some cities deploy special police units to detect and deter illegal gun carrying at times and places where shootings are common. This strategy has reduced shootings in several cities by 30% to 70% without causing the violence to spill over to nearby areas.^{4, 5, 6}

Deterring Offenders While Providing Positive Opportunities

Boston's Operation Ceasefire is a promising strategy for reducing gun violence. Offenders in target areas with the most violent criminal histories are instructed to attend a "call in" meeting. Law enforcement officials tell offenders at these meetings that they will be under surveillance, and will face federal prosecution if they are involved in any violence or firearm offenses. Offenders are also offered assistance, including substance abuse treatment and job training to help them change their lifestyles. Community leaders and family members sometimes attend to encourage positive change. This strategy is associated with substantial reductions in gun violence in Boston⁷ and Indianapolis.^{8, 9, 10} This approach was broadened, somewhat, to include efforts to remedy local problems that appeared to facilitate violence in areas with the highest rates of gun violence in the federally-supported Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program. Local evaluations of PSN initiatives have demonstrated success in reducing gun violence,^{11, 12} and a new study assessing average effects of PSN across 82 cities implementing the program found that higher "doses" of PSN were associated with reductions in violent crime.¹³

Protecting Health, Saving Lives—Millions at a Time

Street Outreach and Violence Interruption

Chicago CeaseFire Program

Chicago's *CeaseFire* program is a public health initiative involving outreach to high-risk youth in neighborhoods with high levels of guns violence, mediation of disputes, and efforts to promote social norms that eschew violence. Street outreach workers—who are typically former gang members—develop relationships with high-risk youth, steer those youth to resources to reduce their risk (e.g., job training), and serve as positive role models. Outreach workers also place themselves in settings where shootings tend to occur, and seek out information about conflicts that could escalate to gunfire. When disputes arise, outreach workers (sometimes with the assistance of “violence interrupters”) help the individuals involved to appreciate the negative consequences of using violence, and offer nonviolent resolutions to the conflict. An evaluation of *CeaseFire* found shootings declined in 6 of 7 intervention neighborhoods, and that the program was associated with significant reductions in shootings and retaliatory homicides in 4 of 7 neighborhoods studied.¹⁴ When program implementation was interrupted as a result of funding cuts, shootings increased in the affected areas.¹⁵ Baltimore's replication of the program has demonstrated significant reductions in homicides in two intervention communities.¹⁶

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September 2010

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